

A
LETTER
FROM A
MEMBER of PARLIAMENT
In TOWN,
TO A
NOBLE LORD
In the COUNTRY,

In regard to the LAST EXPEDITION to
the COAST of FRANCE.

—*Suis non respondere favorem*
Speratum meritis—

HOR.



L O N D O N :
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LETTER, &c.

MY LORD,

THAT every transaction, which takes its rise in this country, and happens to be, for ever so short a time, depending, is always sure, before its final determination, to be discoloured with the tinge of party, has been long the complaint of those political declaimers, who pretend to deal in prognostics, and discover the inward national diseases, which are likely to terminate in the ruin of this our excellent constitution. It must be acknowledged, that some certain writers have been very dextrous and notable in this way, of late; but with all

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their sagacity, there still remains a very strong symptom of national decay, which has escaped the notice of those gentlemen, who not very long since despaired of the republic, and thought proper to inform us, in their gloomy bills of mortality, that old England *was given over*. The symptom I here would be understood to mean, is the present temper of the people towards the land and sea-officers, who are zealous enough to undertake the command of enterprises projected, no doubt, with the laudable and salutary design of annoying the enemies of our country. The general, who does not make the *Weser* run purple with the blood of the French in Germany, or who does not march to the gates of Paris, and take the very metropolis by a *Coup de main*, comes back disgraced; his past services are forgot; his former laurels wither away; and he has only left to deplore, that, as the best intentions cannot insure success, so they are unable to protect him from the general *ill nature* of mankind. The prosperous events of war are now become the criterion by which we judge of an officer's conduct; and the least disappointment

pointment inflames the ill-humours of the populace into such violent fermentations, that nothing but the downfal of a man of merit can allay them.

The last time I had the honour of conversing with your Lordship, I remember we discoursed very largely upon this head : we agreed that *the Estimator of the Manners and Principles* laboured chiefly to fix the approbrium of imbecillity upon our commanders, without being fair enough to point out the weakness, which prevails on the side of the people. Never to be satisfied with an officer without a victory, is unreasonable ; and to be thrown into a consternation, whenever the chance of war makes against us, is the sign of a little and a narrow spirit. Were I inclined to make a parade of my scanty reading, I have here opened to myself a very fair opportunity to display, in a series of quotations, the many examples which history affords us, of the contrary behaviour of some of the most warlike amongst the ancient nations. But, my Lord, I have not leisure to stray in the beaten paths of common-place declamation ; and I be-

lieve your Lordship has been so be-pamphleted for these last thirty-years by the writers who, on the one hand, were upon the full stretch to hunt down a minister (as the phrase is) or, on the other, to cry up his competitor, that you would very little thank me, were I to harrass you with such stale worn-out topicks. Indeed it is not my busines, at present, to take up your time in that sort; having designed to lay before you a plain matter of fact, which, as it suggested the reflections I have here cursorily premised, so it will eminently serve to illustrate the truth of them.

It is my intention, my Lord, to trouble you with a short, fair, and unornamented narrative of the last Expedition to the coast of France; the part lieutenant general Bligh acted in it, and the part his country has acted since his return. To perform this, I suffer myself the more willingly to be attracted by a passage in your Lordship's last letter, where you observe that, unacquainted as you are with that gentleman, yet you cannot help remarking, that the circumstances, which

which have attended his fortunes of late, were very unexpected in their birth, rapid in their progress, dark in their completion, and unhappy in their catastrophe.

Unhappy to him they certainly were, and, I must say, they were altogether undeserved ; as will very evidently appear to any man, who will but pause a moment to review what hath befallen him since the month of July last.—At that time he was flourishing in reputation, in request with his king, and respected by his country : and surely one would imagine, that there is scarcely existing a civilized nation, where a man, in so short a time, could become the very reverse of all this, without some high crime or misdemeanor on his part, to ruin his credit. I am not even slenderly acquainted with Mr. Bligh ; but I cannot help feeling for him, as I think he has laboured under very unjust imputations : as a Briton, I feel much more for my country, because if malevolence is to be the sure result of a miscarriage in war, I am afraid that none but persons of a forlorn hope will,

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for the future, be willing to command our fleets and armies.

Reflect but a moment, my Lord, upon an officer, happy as he could desire to be, a few months ago, and now obliged to abandon his profession, because he cannot any longer hold his employments with honour. General Bligh, it seems, was, in the middle of the last summer, in Ireland, at his country-seat : from thence he was called to command his Majesty's forces, then destined to serve in Germany. The letter from the war-office, recommended to him the utmost expedition. To this, it will be agreed, he paid the greatest attention ; for in less than three weeks from the very date of that letter, he was at the court at Kensington : a very short time to get his equipage together, and too short to get his baggage in readiness. But while he pleased himself with the thoughts of taking upon him a command in a country, of which he had some knowledge, and in a kind of war, for which those who remember the part he acted not very long ago, will allow he was eminently qualified ; to his great disap-

disappointment, he finds himself turned over to another command, in a part of the world, of which he was totally ignorant; a command, in the nature of which most of the general officers in his majesty's service acknowledged they were not very well versed, and which was therefore declined by them. When I hint that the late duke of Marlborough was of this number, let me add, in justice to the memory of that lamented nobleman, that he was conspicuously patient of labour in the service of his country; that he was not deterred from the expedition by any ideas of personal danger or fatigue, but dissuaded from it by the soundness of his judgment, and a sagacious view of the manifold impracticabilities of the project. That these were his motives for relinquishing that command, it is but just to conclude of him, who was ever ready to hazard his life in the service of his king and country, and who at length closed his days in that honourable employment. I believe I might here venture to assert, that another general officer, who now stands high in the estimation of mankind, did not hesitate to declare, that *he would*

go no more upon the frolics of any man whatever.

General Bligh, my Lord, was not less sensible of the difficulties he had to encounter : but he deemed it inconsistent with his honour to hold lucrative employments, without using his best efforts to serve his king and country ; and thus with strong pre-sentiments, with a fore-knowledge of the consequences that might follow from the general temper of the nation towards the commanders of our armies ; and fully sensible, that in so unusual a manner of fighting, disembarking, and re-embarking, &c. he went at the manifest hazard of all that was dear to him ; he nevertheless resolved to accept the command, rather than remain in a state of inactivity, even at a time when he might, without blushing, have followed the example he had before his eyes. From instigations of this nature he complied, and *went upon the frolics of _____*, without having any thing like sufficient time to procure informations relative to the coast of France, its bays and harbours, and the number of forces which the en-

my had in those parts of their territories : and indeed, with regard to all these articles, perhaps the best intelligence to be gained on this side of the water, would have availed him but little : it was reserved for him to buy his knowledge at a very dear rate.—

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, he set out in a very few days, with but one change of cloaths, and some linen, so eager was he to make his own conveniency give way to the public service, and to carry his instructions into immediate execution ; persuading himself, that the declining any command, to which his majesty should think proper to appoint him, was more culpable than the want of success, occasioned by unforeseen accidents, could possibly be in the eyes of the intelligent and the candid. In a short time, we find him destroying the labours of many years at Cherbourg. It is unnecessary, my Lord, for me to expatiate on the advantages redounding to our country from his services at this place. Your Lordship's health detained you from town, at the meeting of the parliament ; but you have taken no-

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tice, that the lords commissioners have declared by his majesty's order, to both houses of parliament, "that the French "have been made sensible, that whilst "their forces are sent forth to invade "and ravage the dominions of their "neighbours, their own coasts are not "inaccessible to his majesty's fleets and "armies. This they have experienced, "in the demolition of their works at "Cherbourg, erected at a great expence, "with a particular view to annoy this "country; and in the loss of a great "number of ships and vessels."—This is surely true praise! and it was the more merited, if we reflect, that while he was doing this valuable business, his little army was frequently alarmed with advices of powerful bodies of men in motion on all sides. The deserters, who came in there, all agreed, there were between 8 and 10,000 regulars within three leagues, and many more expected every hour; not to make mention of several thousands of irregulars. This was afterwards confirmed in the intercourse which our officers held with the French, after the affair of St. Cas. But in defiance of such reports

reports the general persisted, determining not to leave the business unfinished.

Before I pass on to any thing else in the course of the operations of the British army, I beg leave to detain your Lordship, while I make one very obvious reflection. Perseverance was on this occasion crowned with success; and therefore it is extolled with a warmth of encomium: had it been attended with an unprosperous event, upon the same evidences that now lie before us, would not Censure have pronounced with acrimony against him?—

My Lord, the next thing that now remained for the general, was to see what his instructions prescribed; and they directed him “to carry a warm alarm along “the French coast, by continuing with “as much vigour, and giving as much “duration to the various operations of “the expedition, as from the circum-“stances of wind and weather should be “found practicable.” Accordingly the army lands at St. Lunaire, with a design to try if they could not reduce St. Maloes,

by cutting the water-pipes, and thereby oblige the garrison to capitulate ; the object was important ; it was a spirited project ; carried with it a face of probability ; and, even if it miscarried, one great purpose of the expedition was at least sure to be answered : namely, the spreading the alarm along the coast.

Of the idle controversies, which have been started, and warmly agitated, concerning the passing of rivers, and the scandalous ignorance, as it hath been called, of the roads in a country which they knew nothing of, I shall here take no notice : when the disputants about this matter discover a little knowledge of the geography of the country, I shall then perhaps think them worth attending to. I shall, at present, speak to some points, on which our ideas can be better ascertained.

It has been objected, my Lord, that a landing should not have been made, where a re-embarkation could not be easily effected : but are we not unreasonable, if we expect that Mr. Bligh should not only

be a general, but an admiral also? The troops disembarked with great ease, and without any loss, except the accident of a boat being overset, by which eight men were drowned. It was afterward, that the difficulty of re-embarking was made known to the general by lord Howe, who told him, that there was no possibility of the troops getting on-board there ; and therefore recommended to him to march his army round to the bay of St. Cas. That this was a necessary step is plain, beyond a controversy, when we are informed, that on the next day (after lord Howe had thus fixed the rendezvous) the provisions, for the use of the army, were landed with very great difficulty and danger.

Hence it is evident, that the going across the country was not altogether a matter of option ; it was not a mere idle inroad into the enemy's territory, without having any object in view, and without knowing what they were about, as has been determined by the courts-martial that preside in coffee-houses. Moreover this march, even tho' it had not been an act of necessity, must still be found very

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consonant to the Instructions, as it might have a tendency to spread a terror along the coast, and to carry on that warm alarm, which is so warmly recommended.

In the course of this march, I find, my Lord, that there were many flying rumours of the enemy's getting together their forces to attack the British troops. But intrepidity is not very credulous, nor will it be imposed upon by imaginary appearances of difficulty and danger. It looks for reality, and it is happy for this nation that it does; otherwise, your Lordship will observe, the works of Cherbourg would have remained in all their pride to this day; and after all the expence to which these expeditions have put the nation, we should have done the enemy no other damage than what they felt from the levies of contributions, and the burning some of their ships and small craft.

At length it was confirmed at Matignon, that the enemy was then actually advancing to give battle to our little army. Why did they not prepare to receive them, or resolve to march forward
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to attack them ? The answer, my Lord, is ready at hand : Because all the general officers were unanimously of opinion, that the most eligible thing to be done, in their circumstances, was to make the best of their way to the sea-side, in order to embark as soon as possible. This was accordingly done at day-break : why not in the night-time ? If they had, the troops would have been obliged to wait upon the beach for the tide ; and surely the people of England will not expect that general Bligh should *carry a warm alarm* into the very elements, and impress new motions on the air and sea. But, it has been said, why did he not order the army, when they marched at day-break, to file off in two columns ? The inconvenience just mentioned would have happened in this case also, as all the boats were not actually within shore, when the troops arrived on the beach ; nor were they sufficient to take them in, as fast as the men marched down. In short, my Lord, I find every thing possible was done to secure the retreat. The engineer (the proper person for that purpose) was sent forward to reconnoitre the coast, and to make

make the requisite dispositions. Besides, the landing a few pieces of cannon, would ultimately have ended in a compliment to the French, as they must inevitably have been abandoned, when the rear-guard should become unable to stand against superior numbers. Let me add, that it would have been absurd to entertain a thought of giving battle, as it is apparent that the enemy could have declined the offer, until, by a new accession of strength, they were enabled to cut off our retreat, and obtain a complete victory. To think of forcing them to an engagement, would certainly have been a very wild romantic scheme, as they could at all times retreat in the same proportion that the English advanced, which might have drawn our army farther up the country, than would have been prudent or safe. I will even suppose, that the general had attacked and defeated them, yet there must a time come, when a re-embarkation would be necessary. For it was not the general opinion that we had an army powerful enough to conquer France; and I never can suppose, that the most complete victory, that ever was gained, destroyed the whole

whole of the enemy's army; and consequently I must imagine, that there would have been enough left alive to fall upon our rear, and cut off at least as many as were lost by the plan pursued: not to mention that the winds might a second time have so set in, as to cut off all communication with the fleet, and oblige the commodore to stand off to sea, without being able to accomplish an embarkation: by which means the army must have perished for want of provisions.

This way of reasoning, my Lord, is free from sophistry: it is fair; it is conclusive. There remains indeed one objection behind, which must be answered. When it was first heard that the French army was in motion, it hath been asked, Why did not general Bligh form a resolution of departing immediately? It was difficult, as things were then circumstanced, to procure any kind of intelligence that could be relied upon; and there were those in the English camp, who pretended to have had a thorough information, before they left England, of the fortifications, garrisons, *wet and dry ditches*,

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bays, harbours, state of the militia, and the exact number of regular forces throughout the French dominions. One of these thoroughly-informed gentlemen was so well assured of the infallibility of his own intelligence, that he was positive there could not be brought together a sufficient strength to look our little army in the face. Nay more, in a *Babadil humour*, he would undertake to march to the gates of Paris without opposition. To contradict this positive assertion, nothing appeared with any colour of certainty, till our army arrived at Matignon. In this situation of things, would it have been right in an officer of general Bligh's character, to be disconcerted at every random story of an enemy coming down with superior numbers to overpower him? — Had he been susceptible of such quick emotions, he certainly would not have been a proper person to carry a warm alarm along the coast, and to make descents upon any part or parts thereof. I have already observed, that if he had been one of this complexion, Cherbourg would to this day laugh at all the menaces of Great-Britain.

And

With your Lordship's leave I should be glad to urge home to your breast one very serious question: You who know the minds of the people of England, and have therefore, during the whole course of your unblemished life, very wisely beheld popularity with, an eye of indifference, *ocula irretorta*; your Lordship, I say, can resolve me what, in all human probability would have been the voice of the multitude, had Mr. Bligh abandoned the coast of France in the precipitate manner now required, and without ever seeing an enemy? My Lord, the very knowing gentleman, whom I have already alluded to, would have persisted in his story, that the coast was quite clear; the generality of mankind would have believed him (for we know he has heretofore gained credit), and in one of their customary fits of ill-humour they would have pronounced general Bligh void of spirit, liable to be alarmed with groundless apprehensions, and, in the upshot, the duke d'Aiguillon and his army (since found to be superior to ours) would have passed, with some of the best politicians

in England, for nothing but A FEW SAND HILLS.

In this case, not all his past services would have been of any avail to a brave veteran officer, whose character has been long known to the world : and therefore I cannot but embrace this opportunity of congratulating the general, that he did not quit the country without seeing an enemy.

Indeed, my Lord, I could wish he had seen an enemy no where else but in France: it has been his fate to find a severe one at home; and he, who chearfully undertook a service declined by others, who has reflected lustre on his Majesty's arms, and has actually done a detriment to the enemy, which they will feel, perhaps, for a century to come, upon his arrival in London, finds himself proscribed from his Majesty's presence. He is told, that if he went to court, the lord of the bedchamber, by the desire of my lord Ligonier, would not present him. In about a week after indeed, the nobleman just named, did send the general an un-

unsolicited letter, importing, that he might kiss his Majesty's hand when he pleased. Accordingly he goes with ardour to throw himself at his royal master's feet; but the reception!--I forbear--Every mind endowed with a small degree of sensibility, will feel how heart-piercing it must be to a man of honour to find, that prejudices had been done him there, where it had been the study and the business of his life to approve his loyalty and zeal. My Lord, I shall dismiss this head with one short remark. Is it not extraordinary, that a commander of an army, upon a very precarious expedition, should be coldly received, even to a degree of disgrace, after having performed an action, of which such honourable mention hath been made to both houses of parliament?

Your Lordship knows how men of real honour bear imputations on their character: Mr. Bligh felt them in the sharpest manner, and in consequence begged leave to resign all his commissions, disdaining the profit of them, since he could no longer hold them with honour. But, as

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if he had not already suffered enough, when he imagined he had withdrawn himself from the hurry and bustle of affairs, to pass the remainder of his days in an honourable retirement, and an upright independency, FORGERY dares to stalk abroad, and with no small share of effrontery, makes use of the name of a gentleman of rank and character, to lay before the publick as gross an imposition, as perhaps was ever yet passed upon them. At the desire of Mr. secretary Pitt, my Lord, the general wrote a narrative of his operations, from the landing at St. Lunaire; and this being no very deep secret, occasion was taken from thence to publish a letter, in some parts, it is said, like what had been sent to the secretary of state, but full of such interpolations, in such an intemperate stile, and so many sarcastic reflections, as too plainly indicate, that the publication of so fictitious a piece, was principally calculated to serve the indirect purposes of a party. Nor were the authors of this flagrant imposture satisfied with this: by their agents and emissaries they were industrious to propagate a report that, though Mr. Bligh
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had disavowed it in the public papers, yet he was still privy to the transaction ; and they persist, to this day, to insinuate, that it is his real letter. But I take upon me to assure your Lordship, that Mr. Bligh's letter is of a very different complexion from what has been given to the public, because we have his own word for it ; and surely it is but justice to believe the assertion of a gentleman and an officer, who hath ever been accounted a strict preserver of his honour ; and who is allowed, even by those who are least favourable to him, to have acquitted himself, in all spheres of life, with the nicest integrity, and a delicacy in his way of thinking, above making use of any kind of mental reservation in an advertisement, which he hath openly and avowedly uttered to all mankind. As soon as the prosecution, now depending in his Majesty's court of King's-bench, is determined, I am informed the real letter will be published ; and then I am very well assured, that the temper of the whole will be found such as became a man of sensibility, suffering unmerited disgrace. I am assured that a true sense

of honour, and a spirit of independency, breathes through the whole, free at the same time from the party-rage and the over-heated vehemence of invective, which renders the imposture still more base and injurious to the character of Mr. Bligh.

At length, my Lord, we have attended the general from his first acceptance of the command of the expedition, to his final resignation of all his employments. If I have not shewn considerable military skill in the discussion of this question, I have, at least, gone through the whole with integrity. I have stated all the particulars of the narration, without being too minute in the detail: and as I confess myself totally ignorant of the French coast, and the geography of that part of the country, I have not been too descriptive. I could wish that all the pamphlets, with which the press has swarmed on this occasion, had observed the same moderation: but it has been the fate of Mr. Bligh to suffer from malevolence and ignorance; and, if the truth were declared by the booksellers, perhaps almost every one

one of these pamphlets should have for its title-page, ‘ The conduct of a general officer in the late expedition to the coast of France, impartially examined by a political writer in his garret in the Strand.’

I am afraid it will be found too true a reflection, that an equal dispensation of rewards and punishments, has not been always made in this country: and allowing even that I have not been able, in this letter, to give such a degree of illustration to facts, or such strength to my reasonings upon those facts, as to evince, that the general has not incurred the smallest blame: nay, to state it in a stronger light, allowing even that there were some mistakes, yet, my Lord, I am sure the demerit cannot, ought not, in an equitable sense, to be compared with the real merit of his services. But it has so happened, that the former prevails, and the good he has done is now obliterated from the minds of men. This, my Lord, is the present temper of the nation: it puts me in mind of a story I have some-

where read, (I believe La Bruyere is the author) which, I think, will serve to throw a true and proper light upon the conduct of Mr. Bligh, considering it, even in the worst point of view, of a mixed nature, and like almost all human actions marked with error and fallibility. It will likewise serve to illustrate the return he has met with from all degrees and ranks of men.

A young fellow, who had been swimming for some time, was, on a sudden, in the midst of the waters, seized with a cramp, which took away all his powers. The father, who stood on the bank, and in agony beheld his son at the last gasp, in vain intreated the by-standers to venture to his assistance ; they were all unacquainted with the depths and soundings of the river, and they would not go upon such a frolic : when a very honest worthy man, who in the mean time had been stripping himself, cries out, ‘ Stand away,’ and plunges into the river. In the very critical moment he got up to the person in distress, raised his head above the wa-

ter with one hand, and attempted to swim toward the shore, with the help of the other. But he soon found the exertion of both arms necessary; for getting into a deep eddy, just under the bank, he was in danger of going to the bottom: he therefore put the other's thumb into his mouth, and biting pretty strenuously, he dashed the stream with both hands at once, and shortly reached the land, with the object of his compassion, in perfect safety. In some days afterwards the gentleman, who had thus generously risked his life, as he was walking along the street, perceived on the other side of the way, the very person who was indebted to him for his preservation. He instantly flies across the way to him: ' My dear Sir, I am heartily glad to see you.'— ' What the devil are you there?' replied the other, ' and be damn'd to you, you rascal, you have almost bit my thumb off,—and by G—d I'll never speak another word to you while I live.'—

And now, my Lord, after having taken this survey of general Bligh's cafe, it may

not be improper to close the whole with an observation very naturally arising from it ; which is, that the situation of a general officer, conducting a war of this nature, is critical in the last degree ; as it seems to me morally impossible, let his *manœuvre* be ever so judicious, that he should obtain the approbation of the people at home. For if, upon an undoubted information that a superior force is within a few hours of attacking him, he should deem it prudent to retreat, without actually seeing the enemy, detraction will immediately propagate, that he is acted upon by idle fears, and that he shamefully flew before imaginary armies. If, on the other hand, he should wait till his eyes convince him, that he must inevitably be attacked, it will then avail him very little, that the enemy actually lose on the field of battle double the number that happens to be slain on his side. The word will then be—But I need not here repeat it—the scene has been lately acted, and I am afraid will again.

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I have the honour to be, with great
consideration and respect,

My LORD,

Your LORDSHIP'S

London,
9 Dec. 1758.

Most obliged and

Most obedient servant,

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